



## Press release

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### **Japanese start World Cup season with two golds and a world record**

Japan's female racers started the season in spectacular fashion on day one of the ISU World Cup Speed Skating in Heerenveen, the Netherlands, on Friday by clinching two gold medals that featured a world record in the Ladies Team Pursuit.

Nana Takagi, Miho Takagi and Ayano Sato (JPN) beat the Netherlands on home soil and broke Canada's 2009 world record by 0.02 in 2:55.77.

Korea surprised even themselves with the Men Team Pursuit gold. Norway's Håvard Holmefjord Lorentzen secured his maiden World Cup win in the Men's 500m and Nao Kodaira (JPN) took up where she had left off last season, winning the Ladies 500m.

Japan's world record was all the more surprising because the 2009 mark was set on the high-altitude track in Calgary, Alberta, which usually is faster than sea-level Thialf in Heerenveen.

"We expected a time around 2:57," said Japan coach Johan de Wit (NED). "But this doesn't come out of the blue. We have won the World Cup two years in a row and we improve every year. Our big advantage is that we can always train as a team. We invested a lot of time."

The Netherlands had to settle for silver in 2:59.06 and Canada took bronze in 3:00.65. The gap with Japan was more than three seconds, but Ireen Wüst (NED), who took silver with teammates Jorien ter Mors and Antoinette de Jong, was not worried. "They're fast, obviously - it's a world record. They skate 28-second laps towards the end and we only manage 30-second laps," she said. "But I'm convinced that we can match their lap times in the second half of this season."

### **Lorentzen takes maiden World Cup win**

Håvard Holmefjord Lorentzen clocked 34.69 seconds to win the Men's 500m. Nico Ihle (GER) came second in 34.78 and Kai Verbij (NED) third in 34.84.

Lorentzen had to wait a long time before he was sure of the gold medal, having raced in the fourth out of 10 pairings. But one after another the favorites failed to match his time. Dai Dai Ntab (NED), who had won the Dutch title with 34.67 in Thialf in October, had to settle for fifth place in 34.92.

World record holder Pavel Kulizhnikov (RUS), who was hampered by a groin injury the past two weeks, clocked 34.96 to finish sixth.

"I had hoped for the podium," Lorentzen said with the gold medal round his neck and a big smile on his face.

The 25-year-old Norwegian had a breakthrough year last season, when he took silver in the World Sprint Championships. He kept up the good work this summer. “I improved a lot last year and kept building on that,” he said.

Lorentzen knew he was good, just not how good. “My training races in Stavanger were fast but the conditions were not as good as here in Heerenveen, so I expected a fast race, but I did not expect to win the first race of the season.”

Silver medal winner Ihle was excited about his performance too. “My race was very good,” he said. “Normally I need a lot of races to become better and better, so starting the season like this is very good for me.”

### **Kodaira takes first gold in track record**

Nao Kodaira (JPN) was way ahead of the rest of the field in the Ladies 500m. The Japanese World Champion skated a new track record in 37.29. Reigning Olympic Champion and world record holder Lee Sang-Hwa (KOR) came second in 37.60 and 26-year-old Russian Angelina Golikova clinched her first career World Cup medal with bronze in 37.67.

With 37.60, Lee missed her own 2015 track record at Thialf by just 0.01 seconds in the sixth pairing. She was in first place when Kodaira entered the rink in the penultimate pairing versus compatriot Arisa Go. Kodaira did not leave any room for doubt, clocking the fastest opening in 10.2 she crushed Lee’s track record by a third of a second.

Go finished fifth in 37.70. Austrian Vanessa Herzog took fourth place in 37.68.

### **Surprise win for Korea in Team Pursuit**

The Korean team pursuit men have raised their game significantly, but their World Cup win in Heerenveen on Friday, came as a big surprise. “We did not expect this at all,” said a victorious Kim Min Seok.

Korea defeated Canada in the fifth pairing, clocking 3:40.20. New Zealand had already set 3:42.22 and with the Netherlands and Norway entering the rink for the final showdown, Korea and New Zealand still topped the list.

The Netherlands and Norway took first and second place respectively in last year’s overall World Cup, but the home team were not able to live up to the expectations of the Heerenveen crowd. The Dutch fell apart in the first lap and were not able to recover.

Norway got close to the Korean time, but they had to settle for silver once more in 3:41.48. The Netherlands ended up in 10th place and New Zealand thus captured the bronze.

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**About ISU World Cup Speed Skating 2017/18 Series**

The ISU World Cup Speed Skating is a series of international Speed Skating competitions which takes place annually. The Series started in 1984 and usually consists of six or seven events including the ISU World Cup Speed Skating Final. Skaters can earn points at each competition, and the skater who has the most points on a given distance at the end of the series is the World Cup winner of that distance. Skaters also cumulate Grand World Cup points each time they compete in a distance. During the ISU World Cup Speed Skating Final, the Lady and the Man with the most Grand World Cup points is crowned the Grand World Cup winner.

The results on the individual distances in the World Cup ranking are the main qualifying method for the ISU World Single Distances Speed Skating Championships.

A number of World Cup titles are awarded every season, for Men: 500 m, 1000 m, 1500 m, combined 5000 m / 10000 m, Team Pursuit, Mass Start and Team Sprint. For Ladies 500 m, 1000 m, 1500 m, the combined 3000 m / 5000 m, Team Pursuit, Mass Start and Team Sprint.